



Comments on legislation

House Committee, Natural Resources, Great Lakes, Land Use, and Environment
Thursday, 3/16/2006

HB 5554

MEC supports

Request that legislation be amended to require that "green schools" also participate in the state's Safe Routes to School program.

This initiative provides great educational and environmental opportunities, and we are grateful to the sponsors for advancing it. We would suggest a simple amendment to require that "green schools" also participate in the state's Safe Routes to School program (administered by MDOT, Mike Eberlein). The number of students who must be driven to school has increased dramatically in recent years, and the huge burden this places on the environment (particularly in energy consumption and air pollution) cannot be ignored. This program is working to improve walkability and bikeability around schools through changes to school transportation plans and school site location. This is particularly important as large "mega" schools continue to be built far outside of traditional neighborhoods, often leaving students no sidewalks, bike routes, or opportunity to "walk the walk" of environmental responsibility.

HB 5479

MEC supports

Request that legislation be amended to include new schools of all types (not just high schools).

Schools have a huge impact on the development and settlement patterns of a community, and planning for new schools should be done in consultation with the local planning body. This legislation would improve the planning process by requiring that plans for new high schools be shared with the local township planning board for review (it rightly does not apply to new schools in existing towns or villages). Schools are currently exempt from local planning and zoning laws, meaning that new "mega" schools are often built far outside of established communities, perhaps contradicting local development plans and leading to costly redundancy as facilities are closed in established neighborhoods while new buildings are constructed in fringe areas.

HB 4837 and HB 4836

MEC opposes

While our constituents applaud the focus on providing additional protections for affordable housing, we have serious concerns, particularly Sec 3.c's vague listing of required study topics for the housing impact analysis (e.g. reduced supply of land for residential development). We believe this bill could render communities helpless to create or enact locally derived planning initiatives and community development programs intended to improve quality of life in both urban and rural settings. Specifically, the proposed analysis would make it prohibitively difficult for communities to provide innovative, mixed-use housing options, and discourage the rehabilitation of aging housing stock. Before being advanced, this legislation should be amended to also require infrastructure cost and impact analysis and an environmental impact analysis for local ordinance changes.

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